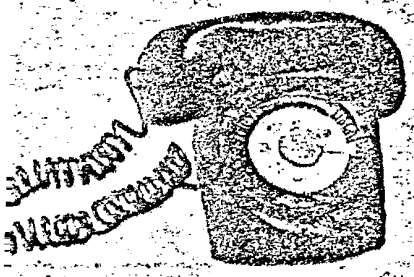
BOOK REVIEW 9 Jan 77



Secrets, Spies And Scholars

Blueprint of the Essential C. I. A.
By Ray S. Cline.
294 pp. Washington, D. C.: Acropolis Books. $10.

Portrait of A Cold Warrior

By Joseph Burkholder Smith.
448 pp. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. $10.95.

By DAVID BINDER

If you can get past the gate of the United States Central Intelligence Agency headquarters you might be able to pick up a copy of the C.I.A.'s contribution to the Bicentennial, a slick red-white-and-blue booklet about "200 years of American intelligence." A spokesman claims it was put together "under pressure from the White House." Nevertheless, there it is, with your favorite all-time American spies, Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton and the Adams boys, and their "political action" groups, "covert operations," and "counterintelligence." The American Revolution as an exercise in espionage.

Beyond such kid stff—and there seems to be a lot of kid stuff in the agency's frat house jargon and Boy Scout patriotism—something infinitely sad pervades books about the C.I.A. including the two under review. Sad, I suppose, because no matter how many flags they raise and lower at C.I.A. headquarters, no matter how many stars they chisel into the marble of the entry hall to commemorate fallen intelligence heroes, spying is somehow basically repugnant to Americans—even "clean" spying with reconnaissance satellites and double-domed analysts. With Beaumont and Fletcher, Americans say: "plot me no plot."

The premise of these books and, one may suppose, all the "house" books to come about the agency is that "we have to do it because the other side is doing it" (a premise happily not applied in the potential cases of imitating Soviet footware or restaurant service). The natural American corollary, to which the authors are not immune, is that if the Soviet Union is doing it, then we should do it better. That, in brief, is the history of postwar American intelligence operations also as related by Mr. Cline and Mr. Smith.

Their vantage points are quite different. Smith, a product of Harrisburg, Pa., Harvard and continually frustrated ambition, was in covert operations from 1951 to 1973, mainly in Asia and Latin America. Cline, a native of Illinois who won scholarships to Harvard and Oxford, was largely in overt operations as an analyst, synthesizer and estimator of intelligence. Their books could not be more dissimilar.

Cline, the scholar, has written, in effect, a short history of the C.I.A. combined with autobiographical narrative. He interprets events, analyzes bureaucratic structures and makes proposals for improving the American intelligence services.

Smith, the operative, has written a child's guide to covert action: the purchase of local newsmen as agency "assets," the clandestine manufacture of propaganda, the interruption of enemy actions, the swinging of elections, the involvement in coups. His tale is complete autobiography, often distastefully sordid and self-pitying.

I am told that Cline went through the proper motions of clearing his manuscript with the agency so as not to be in violation of the secrecy oath he swore on becoming an intelligence officer. Smith, on the other hand, "caused some heartburn" at the C.I.A. by publishing without agency clearance, a spokesman said.

Yet there is a thread connecting these two books about intelligence, and the common thread is the ignorance—the institutionally proclaimed and maintained ignorance—that has separated the overt from the covert and some of the covert from the other covert.

In one instance Cline blithely informs us of his part in checking the veracity of a copy of Nikita Khrushchev's famous February 1956 secret speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin, and of obtaining its release to the press so that "the world would be treated to the spectacle of a totalitarian nation wracked by its own leadership." Cline relates his "amazement"

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failures or partial failures in Singapore, the Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela and Argentina.

Of his assignment to "black" propaganda work in connection with the Bay of Pigs invasion, he writes: "one of the ironies of the Bay of Pigs, C.I.A.'s greatest fiasco, was that so few of the agency's professional staff knew anything about the preparation and launching of the operation while almost every Cuban exile in Miami knew practically everything."

Later he complains that he was not made privy to "the mess of bickering" among contending Cuban exile leaders, which was also germane to his work. At another point Smith arrives in Caracas on assignment from one of his covert superiors only to learn that another superior had countermanded the task, leading to his being greeted by the station chief with: "What the hell are you doing here? Defying me?"

At the higher level there is Ray Cline's sad tale of "national estimates" of Soviet objectives growing from a modest and readable 25 pages in 1950 to "something more like 300 to 400 printed pages—too long in my opinion." It provides a vision of intelligence chiefs drugged by the sheer volume of intelligence and unable to make it usable for policymakers.

For intelligence buffs and students of certain aspects of modern history there are passages in both books that enlighten as well as entertain. For the time being, Cline's is also the most authoritative book on what he calls "the essential C.I.A." and for understanding the complex elements that make up modern intelligence production, processing and distribution.

Perhaps both Smith and Cline make a contribution toward realism insofar as they unwittingly debunk the "cult" of United States intelligence and its allegedly 10-foot-tall powers promoted